



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE
In Cooperation with Tennessee Department of Agriculture
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TWO NASS SURVEYS SET COUNTY ESTIMATES

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – NASS conducts more than 400 surveys each year, but two of our larger and more impactful surveys are our annual Row Crops County Agricultural Production Survey and December Agricultural Survey, the results of which are combined to set our county average yields.

The Row Crops CAPS surveys more than 7,000 farmers in Tennessee to find out their acres planted, acres harvested and production of corn, soybeans, hay (other than alfalfa), cotton and tobacco (burley, dark fire-cured and dark air-cured). This survey was mailed out Oct. 14, and the data collection period goes through early January.

The December Agricultural Survey asks an additional 1,750 Tennessee farmers how many acres of crops they planted, how many acres they harvested and their yield per acre. This survey is mailed out Nov. 18, and the data is collected Nov. 28 through Dec. 13.

NASS's county estimates are used in conjunction with other USDA agencies' estimate calculations to set standards for insurance and risk protection programs many farmers rely on to protect their operations. Farm Service Agency (FSA) relies on county-level estimates for Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC), Price Loss Coverage (PLC), County Loan Rates, and its disaster program calculations. The Risk Management Agency (RMA) uses the data for administering the Area Risk Protection Insurance Plan, establishment of transitional yields, and determining when to make crop loss insurance payments.

When drought and flooding impact crop production, or even in a year with good yields, these data are crucial to the agriculture industry.

NASS sets a goal of 80 percent response rate for all surveys, and with a few exceptions, we aren't meeting that goal. We do the best we can with the data we receive, but the more responses we receive, the better, more accurate our data will be. This is particularly important for these two surveys, because if we don't receive enough reports, we can't publish county estimates.

We often hear from farmers about the published county estimates, and our Tennessee State Statistician, Debra Kenerson, works throughout the year to engage as many farmers as possible in understanding these (and all our) surveys. It's important we

clarify NASS's role in the county estimate process. NASS yields (our county estimates) go off harvested acres. FSA calculates the county estimate off planted acres, so there will sometimes be slight variations. While the two agencies' roles are intertwined, NASS's role is to simply survey the producers, calculate the data and publish it. FSA uses that data to calculate for their programs; we have no role beyond publishing the data.

NASS offers a four-pronged approach for farmers to respond to surveys: Mail-in, respond over the phone, face-to-face interviews, and reply online. Follow-up phone calls will begin for CAPS Nov. 1, and the December Agricultural Survey Nov. 30, if we haven't received a response in the mail or online by that time. If you receive a call to answer a survey and aren't able to access your records or it's not a good time, we encourage you to make an appointment for a convenient time to respond. As always NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents and publishes only aggregate data, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.

County estimates will be published on the following dates:

Small Grains – Dec. 15, 2016

Corn and Soybeans – Feb. 23, 2017

Hay – April 13, 2017

Tobacco – April 27, 2017

Cotton – May 10, 2017

Data strictly from the December Agricultural Yield Survey is published in the Crop Production Annual Report, which is released Jan. 12, 2017.

If you have any questions or concerns, we are always available to help. Debra Kenerson can be reached in our Nashville office at (615) 891-0903 or debra.kenerson@nass.usda.gov.

We want to provide the most accurate, reliable data, and that's why we encourage you to make your voices heard. We need your responses to better serve you and your operations. Respond and be counted!

This is Part 1 of a 2-part series discussing how NASS sets county estimates. Author credit to David Knopf, Eastern Mountain Region Director, and Debra Kenerson, Tennessee State Statistician, National Agricultural Statistics Service.

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